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SUBJECT: FY-2007 TEACHING AREA STUDIES, 11/15-12/2/06: EVALUATION BY
UK/IRAN IVLP ALIMOHAMMAD PEDRAM

REF: LONDON 414

1. SUMMARY/RESULTS-IMPACT

A). Ali Pedram found this an interesting and informative program on all fronts, academically, professionally and personally. It destroyed the preconceived ideas he had of the United States and its culture as well as its foreign policy toward the Middle East. Ali found Americans well informed about international issues and to have astute political judgment. As an Iranian, Ali thought he might encounter hostility from U.S. officials and ordinary Americans, but this was not the case. Although he always kept his passport with him, he was never asked to show it. In fact, he felt very safe and welcome throughout the program. He felt the objective of providing participants with a good grounding in American culture was well achieved and that the overall program was 100 percent successful.

B). The program was packed and the timing could not have been better. It was very beneficial to get a better understanding of how the system of government works and what it does. The IVLP also sparked many interesting and useful contacts, which he has already followed up. Ali was extremely pleased with the opportunity to attend the Middle East Studies Association annual conference in Boston, where he said he was able to meet 85 percent of the best scholars on the Middle East in one place. His home hospitality experiences were wonderful.

C). At his debriefing, Ali mentioned that he would like to see an American-Iranian University Partnership set up to increase academic collaboration and exchanges, and then to develop a university-based, non-governmental institution to help identify potential exchange partnerships in Iran and foster exchanges. Post reported this separately in London 414, dated February 1, 2007, with a recommendation that the Department explore the opportunities the proposal presents. If ever there was a positive result from an IVLP, this is one. Ali felt it important that more dialogue take place between the West and countries like Iran to improve understanding between ordinary Iranians and people from the West, and thus the overall relationship.

D). Ali had high praise for Avi Davidi's work as ELO. Davidi was able to sort out myriad details allowing the participants to make the most of the trip. He also helped them incorporate added elements to the program, such as a meeting with Hill Foreign Affairs Committee staff.

E). Ali enjoyed traveling with Naika Foroutan-Mahin. They had lots of mutual topics in common and they both wanted to get as much out of the project as possible.

12. BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, NOVEMBER 16-24, 2006

A). The overview given by Dr. Mark Silverstein from Boston University was excellent and laid the ground for the remainder of the program.

B). The four day Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Annual Conference was very significant and a great experience academically. It was really useful meeting leading scholars in Middle East studies. In fact, it was difficult to pick which panel discussions to attend, as there were so many excellent ones from which to choose.

C). The meeting at the Northeastern University was also tremendously useful and fruitful. Staff presented the University's academic programs, and in particular their practice-oriented education program and the nation's largest cooperative education program. It was through these meetings, particularly with Professor Denis Sullivan of the Middle East Center for Peace, Culture and Development that Ali developed his proposal for U.S.-Iranian university partnerships. Ali has been offered a visiting fellowship by Northeastern University to help it expand its existing program of cooperation with Middle Eastern universities to include Iran and to organize a video conference in the spring of 2007 with Iranian university students and faculty.

D). He thoroughly enjoyed the home hospitality over Thanksgiving with a family. He had an interesting conversation about the history of Boston. They kindly gave him a gift.

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E). They went to see the film Borat while in Boston, which Ali found very funny.

13. RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA, NOVEMBER 24-29, 2006

A). The local sponsor did a brilliant job in putting together an excellent program. Ali had an amazing experience, from the professional programming to sightseeing. He was fascinated to see that there were two Persian carpet stores plus Persian cafes and restaurants.

B). The meetings at the various universities were really worthwhile. This included:

- Meeting with Ruth Pitts, University of North Carolina (UNC), and Carl Ernst, Director of the Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations, UNC. Ali is in touch with Ruth Pitts and they may collaborate on a study of U.S.-EU relations surrounding the Iran nuclear issue, which he had a chance to discuss during the visit. Ali felt that it is very important for students and scholars to have experience of studying in foreign countries, as it gives them a better understanding of how different people view international relations. A visit to the University Press at Duke University and the Sunday service at the University's chapel were wonderful. It reminded him of the services in Durham Cathedral.

C). One of the highlights of the program was being taken on a three hour driving tour of the Raleigh-Durham area by a former U.S. Ambassador to Turkmenistan, who is the editor in chief of the Diplomacy Journal. Ali found this unnamed host very knowledgeable and intelligent, and he was overwhelmed that such an eminent man would take the time to informally drive around with two foreign visitors. This made an impression on Ali about the volunteer spirit and hospitality of Americans.

D). The home hospitality with Linda Carl was very fun.

14. WASHINGTON, D.C., NOVEMBER 29-DECEMBER 2, 2006

A). Although Ali gained a lot out of the D.C. program, he was sorry that a visit to Capitol Hill was not included in the formal program.

As mentioned earlier, the group managed to organize this themselves with the assistance of ELO Avi Davidi. However, Ali said he would have liked to meet a Member of Congress. Ali also felt that the program would have benefited from meetings with think tanks like Brookings (meeting was cancelled).

B). Because a meeting with the Voice of America was not included in the formal program, Ali arranged his own meeting. He felt that it was unfortunate that this meeting had not been arranged as VOA is the only interface between the USG and the Iranian people. He did not wish to visit VOA for an interview, but rather to see first-hand how this very important institution operated. Ali thought it tremendously important for him and future Iranian visitors to get an understanding of the VOA and how it tries to fulfill an independent journalistic mission while also conveying information about the U.S. and USG policies and maintaining an audience in a competitive communications marketplace. Ali was concerned that the U.S. government was not using this very useful tool to talk to the Iranian people and that they are losing customers to the BBC, which has just opened their Persian Service. While at VOA Ali was asked if he would be interviewed on air, but he declined as it could have put him in an awkward situation back home. It was really useful for him to see how VOA works, how news is spotted, collected and edited. Ali has had some experience with connecting with Iranian youth as a broadcaster in Iran. He would be happy to provide any useful assistance to VOA or the Department of State in this regard.

C). The meetings at the University of Maryland and Howard University were excellent. At the University of Maryland they visited the Center for Persian Studies and had the opportunity to interact with the students. It was interesting to learn that the second or third generation of U.S./Iranians are wanting to learn Farsi and to learn about Persian history and literature. Ali was amazed by the quality of the students in the literature class he attended. Ali was also impressed by Howard University. He felt that the Howard program would flourish within the next three years. He was only sorry that a meeting at Johns Hopkins was not included and that there was no

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area studies component.

D). The concert at the Kennedy Center was good and he was amazed to see that the hall was full. They saw a group of 40 Iranian singers and composers performing classic Persian music. It was a very charismatic evening.

E). Avi Davidi scored another fantastic success when he arranged for Ali to attend an interview between the Saudi Ambassador and Jim Geffries. What was planned as a fifteen minute meeting turned into a fifty minute talk.

G). Asked about how to best structure future Iranian IVLPs, Ali said that the Department of State should focus on non-political or controversial topics such as the humanities, art, literature and perhaps filmmaking. He also encouraged inclusion of inter-religious dialogue and urged us not to forget religious seminary students in Iran when looking for participants as this is a key target audience of future influencers.

TUTTLE